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# Did leak make CIA look good?

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"Although it probably did not cross (Daniel) Ellsberg's mind when he released the Pentagon papers to the New York Times, he succeeded in doing what the (Central Intelligence) Agency, on its own, has rarely been able to do for more than 20 years: He made the CIA look good," writes Chester L. Cooper of the Institute for Defense Analysis in the January "Foreign Affairs."

In his article, "The CIA and Decision-making," Cooper describes the elite Office of National Estimates organized within the CIA in 1950. The small group of intelligence analysts prepares about 50 "estimates" annually on foreign policy problems, such as "Chinese communist nuclear capabilities as they may develop over the next several years..." An estimate is a projection, an opinion or a judgment, Cooper says, "but it is likely to be

the best-informed and most objective view the decision-maker can get."

Citing 13 items from the Pentagon papers, Cooper shows that the policy-makers were apparently warned again and again against the hope of easy U.S. military victory in Vietnam. The reservation "apparently" is necessary because, as Cooper admits, the selection of estimates by the writers and reporters of the Pentagon papers may have been highly selective. But the evidence at hand includes:

*The Pentagon papers revealed that the government went on to support Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam ... but the CIA ... showed willingness to make (intelligence) estimates very much at variance with the current policy line.*

• A 1954 report to the Eisenhower administration that "even with American support it was unlikely that the French or Vietnamese would be able to establish a strong government and that the situation would probably continue to deteriorate."

The government went on to support Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, but Cooper says the CIA then and afterwards showed a willingness to make estimates "very much at variance with the current policy line."

• A 1961 warning to the fledgling Kennedy administration: Diem tolerated corruption and relied on one-man rule, casting doubt on his ability to lead the government.

• A later 1961 report that American military escalation in South Vietnam would be matched by similar escalation by Hanoi.

• A joint intelligence panel dissent in 1964 to the view that bombing would break Hanoi's will to continue the costly war.

• Repeated reports during the bombing that the North Vietnamese were continuing the war with "resolute stoicism" and with relatively unchanged strategy and material resources.

Events, to one degree or another, confirmed the "bearish" intelligence estimates, Cooper notes, wondering aloud how the "yawning gap" between the intelligence structure and the foreign policymakers could be closed.

Basically, he proposes face-to-face meetings between the two groups, possibly by putting the estimators within the National Security Council, which may have a stronger voice with the President. "Clearly if they are to play a more direct and useful role, the estimators must be brought out of their cloister into the real world."

But would the professorial estimators lose their prized objectivity in the quest for greater influence? Possibly, Cooper concedes. But if that issue can be resolved, a new intelligence arrangement "would make available what every President since Truman has said he wanted, but what none of them has been able to obtain on a routine basis — the best possible first-hand intelligence judgments on critical international problems."

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## THE CIA AND DECISION-MAKING

*By Chester L. Cooper*

"The most fundamental method of work . . . is to determine our working policies according to the actual conditions. When we study the causes of the mistakes we have made, we find that they all arose because we departed from the actual situation . . . and were subjective in determining our working policies."—"The Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung."

IN bucolic McLean, Virginia, screened by trees and surrounded by a high fence, squats a vast expanse of concrete and glass known familiarly as the "Pickle Factory," and more formally as "Headquarters, Central Intelligence Agency." Chiselled into the marble which is the only relieving feature of the building's sterile main entrance are the words, "The Truth Shall Make You Free." The quotation from St. John was personally chosen for the new building by Allen W. Dulles over the objection of several subordinates who felt that the Agency, then still reeling from the Bay of Pigs débâcle, should adopt a somewhat less lofty motto. (In those dark days of late 1961, some suggested that a more appropriate choice would be "Look Before You Leap.") But Dulles had a deeper sense of history than most. Although he was a casualty of the Bay of Pigs and never sat in the Director's office with its view over the Potomac, he left a permanent mark not only on the Agency which he had fashioned but on its building which he had planned.

Allen Dulles was famous among many and notorious among some for his consummate skill as an intelligence operative ("spook" in current parlance), but one of his greatest contributions in nurturing the frail arrangements he helped to create to provide intelligence support to Washington's top-level foreign-policy-makers.

Harry Truman, whose Administration gave birth to both the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, recalls that, "Each time the National Security Council is about to consider a certain policy—let us say a policy having to do with Southeast Asia—it immediately calls upon the CIA to present an estimate of the effects such a policy is likely to have. . . .<sup>1</sup> President Truman painted a somewhat more cozy relationship between the NSC and the CIA than probably existed during, and certainly since, his Administration. None the less, it is fair to say that the intelligence community, and especially the CIA, played an important advisory role in high-level policy deliberations during the 1950s and early 1960s.

To provide the most informed intelligence judgments on the effects a contemplated policy might have on American national security interests, a group especially tailored for the task was organized in 1950 within the CIA. While this step would probably have been taken sooner or later, the communist victory